

FOOTPRINTS OF ~~N~~ONSENTIENT DESIGN INSIDE THE HUMAN GENOME

Will Brooks, Ph.D.

[**EDITOR'S NOTE:** The following article was written by A.P. staff scientist Will Brooks, who holds a Ph.D. in Cell Biology from the University of Alabama at Birmingham.]

In the May 11, 2010 issue of the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences (PNAS)*, John Avise authored a paper titled "Footprints of Nonsentient Design Inside the Human Genome" (Avise, 2010). In this article, Avise highlighted several alleged evidences from the human genome which, according to him, prove it could not have been created by intelligent design, but rather must be a product of natural selection over countless years of time. The author calls his evidence an "argument from imperfection." The thesis for his argument in favor of evolution is that the human genome, while undeniably complex, is riddled with errors and imperfections. Avise contends that the simple presence of these alleged fallibilities argues against an omnipotent Creator and, instead, is evidence for a nonsentient process (natural selection). This article addresses each of the major arguments posed by Avise.

ARGUMENT 1: FALLIBLE DESIGN— PROTEIN-CODING DNA SEQUENCES

The first argument posed by Avise is little more than an offshoot of a widespread argument questioning the existence of God: the problem of

evil, pain, and suffering. In his paper, Avise describes the large compendium of known human diseases and disorders caused by genetic mutations and chromosomal abnormalities. His point: if the human genome were created by intelligent design, why would a designer intentionally infuse error into his creation, which would lead to human disease? The author contends that the flaw in this design is evidence that it was, in fact, not designed.

It is well known—even to those far removed from science and medicine—that numerous human diseases and disorders trace their causality back to DNA and genetic mutation (e.g., sickle-cell anemia, cystic fibrosis, phenylketouria, and brittle bone disease, to name a few). The question then becomes, if the human genome were designed by an intelligent designer (God), why would He infuse error, which leads to human disease? There are several answers to this question. The first was posed by Avise himself: "An apologist for the intelligent designer might be tempted to claim that such deleterious mutations are merely unavoidable glitches or secondary departures from a prototypical human genome that otherwise was designed and engineered to near perfection" (Avise, p. 8972).

In other words, God created Adam and Eve with no errors (mutations). However, spontaneous mutations

arose by natural forces in successive generations, which have led to the disease-causing mutations that we see today. There is probably some truth and some fault in this line of thinking. God undoubtedly created the first man and woman with genetic perfection (cf. Genesis 1:31—"very good"). However, God in His infinite wisdom would never create perfection, only to allow it to become imperfect, without knowing that outcome from the beginning. When Adam and Eve sinned, they opened the floodgates to innumerable complications and

CONTENTS

ARTICLES

*Footprints of ~~N~~onsentient Design
Inside the Human Genome*

Will Brooks 73

Only True Christianity is Defensible

Kyle Butt. 76

DEPARTMENTS

Speaking Schedules 77

Note from the Editor

Christians Should Examine Islam 80

RESOURCES

Save the Planet! Kill the People!? 37-R

In the News 40-R

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distortions of the originally perfect creation. While God did not cause the perversion of perfection, His foreknowledge of it allowed Him to order human existence in a way that He could use the calamity to bring about His ultimate, good will.

Second, imagine a world where there is no disease—a health-utopia if you will. Without disease, there is no suffering. Without disease, there is no death. A world devoid of suffering and death due to health problems seems quite enticing. However, what would happen to our natural resources and space constraints if human longevity and fertility were extended? The Earth of six billion people present today would, instead, contain untold numbers. Extending this to all organisms, a disease-free pool of animals and plants would very quickly overpopulate the planet. Disease, while having terrible consequences that we all must face, serves in part to control the population of humans as well as that of all species.

Third, throughout Scripture we can see God using disease and the healing of disease to illustrate His own power and prove His existence. How many times in the Old Testament did God work through prophets to heal the sick? How many ailments were cured by Jesus to prove that He was the

Messiah? God has used the healing of disease throughout time to serve as a sign, to bring attention to one individual and what he had to say, and for His own glorification. Disease is not just a plague on mankind, but rather a tool used by God.

ARGUMENT 2: BAROQUE DESIGN— GRATUITOUS GENOME COMPLEXITIES

The second argument brought forth by Avise to contend with creationism is one that, traditionally, creationists have championed over the years: biological complexity. Stemming in part from Michael Behe's *Darwin's Black Box* (1996), the immense nature of biological complexity has been used widely to dispute evolution. Here the author asserts:

[G]ratuitous or unnecessary, biological complexity—as opposed to an economy of design—would seem to be the antithesis of thoughtful organic engineering. Yet, by objective scientific evidence, gratuitous and often-dysfunctional complexities (both in molecular structure and molecular operations) are so nearly ubiquitous as to warrant the status of hallmarks of the human genome (Avise, p. 8972).

Two major areas of complexity are addressed by Avise as being “gratuitous”: gene splicing and gene regulation.

Gene splicing still puzzles scientists today, more than 30 years after its initial discovery. Most eukaryote genes (DNA sequences that code for proteins) exist in their respective genomes as fragmented DNA sequences separated into these pieces by other non-coding DNA. The intervening non-coding sequences are known as introns, while the fragments of functional coding DNA are known as exons. When genes are transcribed into mRNA prior to protein production, the introns must be cut away and the fragmented exons spliced together to generate a functional mRNA molecule ready to be read into protein. See Figure 1.

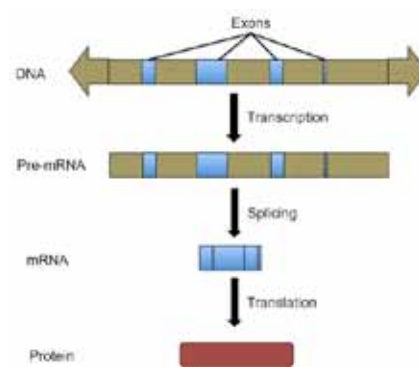


Figure 1: Exons are the coding sequences of human genes that are transcribed, along with intervening sequences known as introns into a pre-mRNA molecule. The splicing process allows the pre-mRNA to be cut, the introns to be removed, and the remaining exons to be spliced together to form a functional mRNA molecule. The resulting mRNA is then used as a template to generate a functional protein.

As described in this article, a vast amount of genome space, cellular energy, time, and other resources are devoted to this splicing process. The author makes the claim that this rigmarole (to get a functional mRNA) is overly complex and thus evidence against a Creator. The problem with his logic is twofold.

First, there are known advantages attained by the human cell because we splice our mRNAs. The human genome encodes an estimated 24,000 different genes. But, through a process known as alternative splicing, our cells have the capacity to make much greater numbers of distinct proteins.

Reason & Revelation is published monthly by Apologetics Press, Inc. Periodicals postage paid at Montgomery, AL. **POSTMASTER:** Send address changes to **Reason & Revelation**, 230 Landmark Dr., Montgomery, AL 36117; **ISSN:** [1542-0922] **USPS#** 023415.

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Most genes whose exons are spliced may be spliced together in different ways using different combinations of exons. This allows for one gene in the human genome actually to manufacture multiple, distinct protein products, extending what we refer to as the proteome into a size much larger than that of the genome. Furthermore, alternative splicing allows a single uniform human genome to encode countless different protein combinations, making our differing cell types unique. For example, a neuron is a neuron because it produces one set of protein products, while a muscle cell has its own unique properties because it produces a distinct compliment of proteins. Likewise, red blood cells and liver cells each have their own specific repertoire of proteins that make them specialized and unique.

The second problem with this logic is that if we assume gene splicing is gratuitously complex, then why would natural selection have favored its inception and maintenance over millions to billions of years? Bacteria do not splice their genes and even lack the machinery for the splicing processes. So, if splicing arose by evolutionary mechanisms and is found in higher organisms, then according to evolutionary theory, it must present some fitness advantage. Avise argues that splicing is too complex and that the fitness costs outweigh the benefits. This simply does not conform to the paradigm of natural selection. The truth is that splicing is an advantage to eukaryotic species, including humans, and is one of many reasons why we are more complex than bacteria. Therefore, this advantageous process is not a mistake of creation, but rather a highlight of creation.

Gene regulation is one of the most complex issues in molecular biology and genetics. In a nutshell, gene regulation is the immense set of control mechanisms that determine when genes are expressed into protein, in what cell types genes are expressed, in what quantity genes are expressed, and once expressed as a protein, when that protein will become active. Without

a detailed understanding of gene regulation, it is hard to grasp the full amount of complexity. The fact is: it is staggering. However, the greater the complexity a system contains, the more opportunity exists for errors and mistakes. In his paper, Avise states,

Why an intelligent and loving designer would have infused the human genome with so many potential (and often realized) regulatory flaws is open to theological debate. Any such philosophical discussion should probably include the issue of whether the designer was fallible (and if so, why?). It should also address whether the designer might have recognized his own engineering fallibility, as perhaps evidenced, for example, by the DNA and RNA surveillance mechanisms that catch some (but not all) of the numerous molecular mistakes (p. 8974).

He goes on to write that “the complexity of genomic architecture would seem to be a surer signature of tinkered evolution by natural processes than of direct invention by an omnipotent intelligent agent” (p. 8974).

The sheer arrogance of statements such as those above is astounding. Molecular biologists, such as myself, are quick to explain that we understand only a tiny fraction of the complexities of gene regulation. Science is in no position to begin discussing the problems of gene regulation on a philosophical level, because **there is so much that we do not know**. New layers of gene regulation are discovered on a regular basis. One of the most recent, major discoveries is micro RNAs (miRNA), first identified 17 years ago, whose full scope for regulation was not realized until this decade (He, 2004). The complexities of gene regulation are what drive every aspect of cell and organismal physiology. To put it simply, they are what make us tick. Do “mistakes” occur? Sure. But, who can know the potential advantages of these alleged mistakes in the big picture? Certainly not Dr. Avise.

ARGUMENT 3: WASTEFUL DESIGN— REPETITIVE DNA ELEMENTS

The diploid human genome is roughly six billion base pairs in length. But, it is estimated that less than 2% of the genome is composed of functional, protein-coding DNA sequences. The vast majority of the DNA sequence consists of non-coding introns, regulatory sequences, repetitive DNA elements, and other uncharacterized sequences. DNA is the basic genetic material because it codes for the proteins and RNAs needed for all biological processes. So, as Avise notes, why is there so much non-protein coding DNA sequence that some have called “junk DNA”? He makes the argument that if the human genome were truly designed, it is a flawed, wasteful design.

On the surface, the huge quantity of allegedly useless DNA does seem quite wasteful. Every cell that divides must duplicate all of its extra DNA and carry these “extra pounds” along each generation. If this DNA truly is useless, then it is a time, energy, and resource burden on the cell. But our cells seem to function just fine with the extra DNA. If the human genome arose by evolutionary means, natural selection has not favored discarding this DNA over the alleged billions of evolutionary years. So, the repetitive DNA elements would not seem to be an evolutionary fitness disadvantage.

Furthermore, as we learn more about genomics, scientists are finding new properties and new functions for much of this “extra” DNA. We have already discussed the usefulness of introns to allow alternative splicing. Additionally, the aforementioned miRNAs are encoded by intronic and other non-coding DNA elements. Another recent discovery is that of the long noncoding RNAs (Petherick, 2008). These RNAs have undefined function, but are found within non-coding DNA elements. Whether much of the human genome truly is “junk DNA”—or if its true function is yet-to-be-defined—is still unresolved. What we do know is that we are still



learning about the structure of the human genome and, thus, it is too early to tell, from a scientific standpoint, whether all of that extra DNA can be defined as “wasteful.”

CONCLUSION

The human genome is an immense, complex set of nucleotides that carries all of the information needed to properly form a human being and to sustain his or her life. Since its sequencing in 2003 and even well before, there has been an explosion of scientific inquiry into the inner workings of this amazing genetic material. We know, through our scientific explorations, that the human genome across the human population does contain mutations, structural abnormalities, and other anomalies. Many of these are inert, causing no disease or harm to their bearers, while others cause a variety of human diseases and disorders. The truth is that the so-called imperfections in the human genome are neither evidence against a Designer, nor are they evidence in favor of natural selection and evolution.

A commentary to Avise’s article was published in *PNAS* in the July 27 issue calling into question the overall thesis of his work. Philosophy professor Michael Murray and biologist Jeffrey Schloss wrote: “Arguing that the presence of ‘genetic evil’ undercuts appeals to divine agency is superfluous and detracts from rather than advances scientific discussion...the line of argument made against ID [intelligent design—WB] is, in addition to being superfluous, actually unsound” (Murray and Schloss, 2010, p. E121). Countless highly structured characteristics of the human genome provide evidence for intelligent design. These range from the four simple nitrogenous bases (A, T, G, and C) that make up the vast expanse of the genome, to the incredibly ordered packaging of DNA into the cell nucleus. God has clearly demonstrated His hand in the design of the human genome. The “imperfections” that Avise brings forth pale in comparison to the overwhelming functionality of this genetic marvel.

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Only True Christianity is Defensible

Kyle Butt, M.A.

Recently I was involved in a very productive discussion with two atheists. They were in their early thirties, intelligent, and extremely well spoken. We arranged the meeting to discuss why they had chosen to adopt atheism, and reject God and Christianity. In the course of the two-hour discussion, it became clear that many of their complaints about “Christianity” were legitimate. In fact, I heartily agreed with a host of their lengthy refutations of, and rebuttals to, “Christianity.” Lest I mislead the reader, however, let me explain. Notice that I have put in quotation marks the “Christianity” against which they railed, because the term demands qualification. Much of the “Christianity” that so incensed these young men involved gross misrepresentations of God and heinous misinterpretations of the Bible. For instance, during the discussion, one of the men explained that if, according to John Calvin’s views, God arbitrarily chose some people to be saved and some to be lost, regardless of their choices, then God would be unjust. He explained this point in detail for several minutes. After listening attentively to his astute refutation of Calvinism, I completely agreed with him, but noted that Calvinism is not true Christianity. It seemed that since Calvinism had been so inseparably bound-up in many “brands” of “Christianity” to which this young man had been exposed, he was taken aback that any “Christian” would so

readily agree with his assessment of its evident flaws.

The discussion with these men, coupled with a critical reading of the atheistic community’s primary authors, has impressed upon my mind the fact that skeptical writers have a knack for exposing pseudo-Christianity for the error that it truly is. Unfortunately, skeptics often use the pseudo-Christianity and misinterpretations of the Bible that they so adequately debunk as straw men that they insist represent true Christianity. In truth, they certainly do not. It is a useful study, however, to notice several areas of biblical misinterpretation and un-Christian beliefs that skeptics have correctly identified as flawed.

THEISTIC EVOLUTION IS INDEFENSIBLE

In 2006, David Mills authored a book titled *Atheist Universe: The Thinking Person’s Answer to Christian Fundamentalism*. Much of the material in that book is incorrect. But chapter six, titled “Can Genesis Be Reconciled with Modern Science?” has some trenchant things to say about those who claim to believe the Bible but try to bend its interpretation to jibe with modern evolutionary findings. At the beginning of the chapter, Mills stated:

According to Genesis, God made Adam and Eve on the sixth day of Creation Week. The Genesis genealogies then detail the exact ages at which Adam and his male descendants “began” their own male offspring. The New Testament books of Matthew and Luke [NOTE: Mat-



Save the Planet! Kill the People!?

Eric Lyons, M.Min.

On September 1, 2010, James Jay Lee entered the Discovery Channel corporate headquarters building in Silver Spring, Maryland and took three hostages at gunpoint, threatening to detonate his explosive-covered body. Following a nearly four-hour standoff, police shot and killed Lee without the hostages being harmed by the explosives or gunfire.

Since James Lee's death, much has come to light about his radical environmental beliefs. Many in the mainstream media ignored or downplayed Lee's previously posted environmental rants. (Lee posted a manifesto at savetheplanet.com prior to his hostile actions on September 1; see Lee, 2010). Some may justify disregarding Lee's extreme human-hating, planet-saving views because he was delusional, or mentally ill, or simply because the global-warming, environmental movement should not be discredited on the basis of one man's extreme actions. (The mainstream media, however, do not ignore the strongly held beliefs of a "Bible-believing," delusional pro-lifer who bombs an abortion clinic.) Of course, it is true that the actions of a person should not discredit a particular belief system or religion, if the individual is acting in opposition to his or her beliefs. **The fact is, however, Lee was actually taking environmental, evolutionary, atheistic beliefs to their logical conclusion.**

Like a growing number of environmental, global-warming alarmists, James Lee made perfectly clear that the human population needs to be reduced drastically. In his pre-crusade post, Lee wrote about the "problem of human overpopulation," saying, "the planet does not need humans" (Lee, 2010). "Saving the plant means saving what's left of the non-human Wildlife by decreasing the Human population. That means stopping the human race from breeding any more disgusting human babies!... Nothing is more important than... saving the environment and the remaning [sic] species." As if the Discovery Channel does not already heavily advocate the General Theory of Evolution, Lee emphasized how they must "[t]alk about Evolution... and Darwin until it sinks into the stupid people's brains..." (Lee, 2010).

For someone who rejects God and the Bible, but believes that humans (1) evolved by time and chance over millions of years, and (2) are currently wreaking havoc on the only known planet in the Universe that can support life, destroying human lives to save "Mother Earth" is perfectly rational. James Lee may have been mentally ill, but his flippant attitude about humanity and his willingness to end the lives of humans

for the sake of Earth is perfectly consistent with atheistic, evolutionary beliefs.

At his "2006 Scientist of the Year" award ceremony in Beaumont, Texas, evolutionary ecologist Eric Pianka expressed his Lee-like concerns about human overpopulation. According to attendee Forrest Mims,

Professor Pianka said the Earth as we know it will not survive without drastic measures. Then, and without presenting any data to justify this number, he asserted that the only feasible solution to saving the Earth is to reduce the population to 10 percent of the present number.... His favorite candidate for eliminating 90 percent of the world's population is airborne Ebola (*Ebola Reston*), because it is both highly lethal and it kills in days, instead of years.

Did Pianka release Ebola upon his audience? No. Did he take hostages as James Lee did in Silver Spring, Maryland? No. But, if he had, he merely would have been acting out what he and millions of atheistic evolutionists around the world believe: "We're no better than bacteria!" (as quoted in Mims, 2006).

The truth is, humans are better than bacteria! We are better and more valuable than any plant or animal on Earth because God made us better. He created **man** "in his own image" (Genesis 1:27). He gave **man** an immortal soul (Zechariah 12:1; Matthew 10:28). And he gave **man** the responsibility, not to destroy human life to save the planet (Genesis 9:6), but to "fill the earth and subdue it" and "have dominion... over every living thing that moves on the earth" (Genesis 1:28).

For those who refuse to have God in their knowledge (Romans 1:28), life will forever be filled with the self-contradictory, unreasonable, inhumane lies of atheistic evolution. But, for those who "come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2:4), and embrace man's God-given role on Earth, beliefs and actions will remain consistent, rational, and in harmony with God's Word.

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The Gulf Oil Spill and the Creator

Dave Miller, Ph.D.

As radical environmentalists shook their heads and hands in horror, and liberal entertainers, quite hypocritically, called for the death penalty for BP execs (Morino, 2010), the oil leak was finally capped in the Gulf of Mexico. The official government estimate: 4.9 million barrels of oil were released into the Gulf, compared with 257,000 barrels in the 1989 Exxon Valdez oil spill ("Oil Disaster...", 2010). For the atheist and evolutionist, such doomsday announcements are frightening. After all, they do not believe in the God of the Bible, nor do they believe the Earth was created by Him. They do not believe that the planet was specifically designed to serve specific purposes intended by the Creator. They do not believe that the creation possesses inherent resiliency and self-perpetuating variables. They certainly do not believe that the entire Universe is sustained and held together by Jesus Himself (Colossians 1:16-17; Hebrews 1:3; 1 Corinthians 8:6). Hence, in harmony with their naturalistic theory, they think it is up to humans to "save the planet" and prevent "planetary emergency" (Gore, 2006, p. 8).

As unnerving and unfortunate as the Gulf oil spill may be, yet, once again, more evidence has "surfaced" that divine design regulates the planet. Microbiologists and microbial ecologists report that oil-gobbling bacteria are "flocking to the...crude in droves" ("Bacteria Are...", 2010, 329:1005). Scientists say the oil has degraded at a rate "much faster than anticipated" due to a "newly-found and unclassified species of microbes" (Kuo, 2010). Scientists are astounded that, not only do the bacteria break down and disperse the oil particles, they do so without significantly depleting the oxygen level in surrounding seawater. Researchers conclude that the bacteria play "a significant role in controlling the ultimate fates and consequences of deep-sea oil plumes in the Gulf of Mexico" (Hazen, et al., 2010).

If the God of the Bible exists, wouldn't we expect Him to make the creation resilient, hearty, and generally able to take care of itself? Wouldn't we expect Him to embed within the environment those features that would be necessary to perpetuate human life until He brings all earthly existence to an

end? Yes, we would. And that is precisely what the evidence consistently demonstrates. Yes, humans can inflict damage—but no **ultimate** harm that would endanger the divinely intended purpose of the environment. Atheistic evolutionists, and their environmentalist protégés, cannot be trusted to provide realistic reactions to oil spills and other manmade mistakes. The sobering perspective that ought to characterize every human being is reflected in the questions posed by God to Job and Jeremiah:

[W]ho shut in the sea with doors, when it burst forth and issued from the womb;

When I made the clouds its garment, and thick darkness its swaddling band;

When I fixed My limit for it, and set bars and doors;

When I said, "This far you may come, but no farther, and here your proud waves must stop!"? (Job 38:8-11).

"Do you not fear Me?" says the LORD. "Will you not tremble at My presence,

Who have placed the sand as the bound of the sea, by a perpetual decree, that it cannot pass beyond it?

And though its waves toss to and fro, yet they cannot prevail;

Though they roar, yet they cannot pass over it (Jeremiah 5:22).

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thew and Luke actually do not give ages—KB] then continue the genealogy from David to Jesus, again specifying the age at which each male descendent “begat” the next generation. Since we have a fixed “historical” time period for Jesus’ birth, creationists thereby calculate that the heavens and Earth were created by God in the year 4004 B.C. Earth, therefore, is only 6000 years old by biblical chronology. [NOTE: Although Mills is correct about the general age of 6,000 years, the chronology is not so precise as to nail down the exact date of 4004 B.C.—KB.] Despite widely divergent viewpoints, creationists and evolutionary biologists agree on a crucial fact: Six-thousand years is insufficient time for evolution to have produced the complex life-forms we observe on Earth today.... A 6000-year-old Earth means therefore that Genesis and the Theory of Evolution are forever irreconcilable (p. 137).

Mills further noted:

If Earth’s history began with Creation Week, and if Genesis provides an accurate historical record, then Earth had no prehistoric eras, no prehistoric peoples, and no prehistoric animals. Dinosaurs walked the Earth only a few thousand years ago, side-by-side with modern man (p. 141).

Mills went on to write: “If creationists now wish to abandon their historical position and acquiesce to an ancient Earth, then I applaud their progress. **But it is a farce to maintain that Genesis never really demanded a young Earth since the genealogies were always intended as metaphors**” (p. 148, emp. added).

Regarding those who attempt to compromise the literal nature of Genesis and accept both the Bible and evolution, Mills wrote: “Citing the Day-Age theory, these Great Pretenders make believe that Genesis actually describes an ancient Earth. The purpose of this pompous intellectual charade is to allow the Great Pretenders to ‘have it both ways’—imagining themselves to be both religious and scientific at the same time” (p. 151). In what sounds exactly like a young Earth apologist’s writings, Mills then commented: “In seeming anticipation and preemptive rebuttal of the Day-Age theory, however, the Book of Genesis itself provides a clear and specific definition of Creation Week...the evening and the morning’ were a day—a literal 24-hour day” (p. 151).

Mills is exactly right in regard to the fact that a compromise of the Genesis account of Creation is indefensible and illogical. He does an excellent job of showing that the special pleading needed to warp the text of Genesis into agreement with modern evolutionary ideas cannot stand critical scrutiny. He concludes correctly that: “A 6000-year-old Earth means therefore that Genesis and the Theory of Evolution are forever irreconcilable” (p. 137). Those who compromise the text of Genesis in an attempt to force it to agree with modern evolutionary teachings have gotten it wrong, and would do well to listen to Mills’ criticism of their inaccurate interpretation.

Unfortunately, Mills leaves his critical thinking at the doorstep of his correct assessment that the Bible and evolutionary theory are irreconcilable. He incorrectly reasons that the Bible has been wrong all along and that evolution is the true creative agent of our planet. We have shown repeatedly that such simply cannot be the case (cf. Jackson, et al., 2008), and Mills and other atheists would do well to apply the same critical thinking to the false evolutionary theory as they so aptly apply to indefensible compromises of the biblical text.

INHERITED SIN

Many people who consider themselves Christians today have accepted the idea that humans are born with a sinful nature. These religious people believe that sin can be inherited from one’s ancestors, and that every human, even infants, deserve death due to their inherently sinful nature. The Bible, however, nowhere teaches such a doctrine. Thus, when atheists and skeptics seize on this false interpretation of Scripture, they correctly insist that such a teaching would manifest a contradiction in the nature of the God of the Bible.

Christopher Hitchens, in his discussion of Christ’s death on the cross, wrote:

Furthermore, I am required to believe that the agony was *necessary* in order to compensate for an earlier crime in which I also had not part, the sin of Adam.... Thus my own guilt in the matter is deemed “original” and inescapable. However, I am still granted free will with which to reject the offer of vicarious redemption (2007, p. 209, italics in orig.).

Hitchens correctly concluded that such an idea “negates the moral and reasonable idea that the children are innocent of their parent’s offenses” (p. 99). Richard Dawkins weighed in on the idea as well: “The sin of Adam and Eve is thought to have passed down the male line—transmitted in the semen according to Augustine. **What kind of ethical philosophy is it that condemns every child, even before it is born, to inherit the sin of a remote**

SPEAKING SCHEDULES

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October 16-17	Paris, TN	(731) 642-2861
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Eric Lyons

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Dave Miller

October 4-6	Luverne, AL	(334) 335-5089
October 8-10	Holly Lake, TX	(903) 769-7088
October 21-22	Waco, GA	(678) 469-0726
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ancestor?” (Dawkins, 2006, p. 251, emp. added).

Hitchens, Dawkins, and numerous other atheistic writers correctly conclude that a god who condemns children because they inherited their ancestors' sins would be an unjust being unworthy of worship. The biblical portrait of God, however, is not of such a cruel, unjust being. In fact, it is the exact opposite. The Bible points out in unambiguous terms that children do not inherit the sins or guilt of their ancestors. The prophet Ezekiel wrote: “The one who sins shall die. The son shall not bear the guilt of the father, nor the father bear the guilt of the son. The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself” (18:20). It has been shown repeatedly and beyond doubt that the Bible never indicates that children inherit sin or guilt from their parents (Butt, 2004), nor do children ever suffer any type of **spiritual** punishment as a result of the sins of their parents (Butt, 2003). While it is the case that children often suffer **physical** consequences of their parents' wrong choices, such as when a drunken father abuses his children, it is not the case that those children bear any of the father's **spiritual** guilt or inherit any of their parents' sin.

One can completely understand why the skeptical community would be aghast at a being who would cast innocent babies into hell as punishment for the sins of their parents. Yet, a correct interpretation of the Bible shows that such is not the case. While it is sad that many religious people have falsely taught such a view, their false teaching on the subject, and the skeptics' acceptance of that false teaching as a correct interpretation of the Bible, cannot be used as a legitimate weapon to impugn the character of the God of the Bible.

WRONG DEFINITION OF FAITH

It is unfortunate for Christianity that some who call themselves Christians completely misunderstand the basic concept of faith. For many in Christendom, faith is a warm feeling in their hearts when they have

failed to find adequate evidence to justify their beliefs. Modern dictionaries have done much to engrain this false definition of faith into modern Christianity. For instance, *Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary* states that faith is “a firm belief in something for which there is no proof” (1988). *The American Heritage Dictionary* gives as a primary definition of faith: “belief that does not rest on logical or material evidence” (2000, p. 636). The idea that faith is a warm, fuzzy feeling divorced from logical thinking and separated from all “material evidence” does not coincide with what the Bible actually says about faith (cf. Sztanyo, 1996). As Sztanyo correctly noted: “There is not a single item in Christianity, upon which our souls' salvation depends, that is only ‘probably’ true. In each case, the evidence supplied is sufficient to establish conclusive proof regarding the truth of the Christian faith” (1996, p. 7).

The false view that faith is “a leap in the dark” without adequate evidence provides the skeptical community plenty of fodder for their atheistic, anti-Bible cannons—and rightly so. If believing in God, or the divine inspiration of the Bible, or the deity of Jesus Christ is not established by rational, logical evidence, then those ideas are as unworthy of belief as the unprovable ideas of atheism and evolution. Knowing the inconsistency of such a false definition of faith, Sam Harris wrote: “In fact, every religion preaches the truth of propositions for which no evidence is even *conceivable*. This put the ‘leap’ in Kierkegaard’s leap of faith” (Harris, 2004, p. 23, italics in orig.). Christopher Hitchens, building on the “leap of faith” idea, opined:

Actually, the “leap of faith”—to give it the memorable name that Søren Kierkegaard bestowed on it—is an imposture. As he himself pointed out, it is not a “leap” that can be made once and for all. It is a leap that has to go on and on being performed, in spite of mounting evidence to the contrary (2007, p. 65).

In his analysis of religion, Richard Dawkins quipped: “The whole point of religious faith, its strength and chief glory, **is that it does not depend on**

rational justification” (2006, p. 23, emp. added). Because of his belief that biblical faith is belief without rational justification, Dawkins concluded: “We believe in evolution because the evidence supports it, and we would abandon it overnight if new evidence arose to disprove it. **No real fundamentalist would ever say anything like that**” (p. 283). What Dawkins really means to say is that no fundamentalist who has adopted the concept that faith does not depend on rational justification would abandon his or her belief if evidence were provided to the contrary. But if his definition of faith is wrong, then he is incorrect to conclude that those who believe in God, the divine inspiration of the Bible, and the deity of Christ would not alter their views based on the evidence. In fact, according to a proper definition of biblical faith, **it is only because of the rational justification and logical evidence available** that true Christians hold to their beliefs.

When Dawkins states, “Christianity, just as much as Islam, teaches children that unquestioned faith is a virtue. You don’t have to make the case for what you believe” (p. 306), he manifests his lack of knowledge of what biblical faith is. Biblical faith is based completely and solely on truth and reason, as the apostle Paul succinctly stated in Acts 26:25. The prophet Isaiah underscored this fundamental truth about biblical faith when He recorded God’s invitation to the Israelites: “‘Come now, and let us **reason together**,’ says the Lord” (1:18). Luke, in his introduction to the book of Acts, pressed the point that Jesus’ resurrection was attested by “many infallible proofs” (1:3). For one to believe in the resurrection requires faith, based on infallible proofs.

Sam Harris wrote: “It is time that we admitted that faith is nothing more than the license religious people give one another to keep believing when reasons fail” (Harris, 2006, p. 67). Harris’ accusation is justified when it is applied to false religions, and to those who attempt to defend Christianity without providing a logical, rational justification for their belief. But his allegations, and similar sentiments from Dawkins, Hitchens, and

other atheists, are wholly inadequate to attack true, biblical faith. Sadly, too many self-proclaimed Christians open the door for the skeptical community to bash Christian “faith,” when, in reality, the “faith” that is being destroyed was never biblical in the first place.

MODERN MIRACLES

It is often the case that “Christianity” is abused by modern skeptics due to the tendency of many in Christendom to claim that the Holy Spirit continues to work miracles today just as He did during New Testament times. Atheist Dan Barker wrote about the time that he was thrown out of “Peter Popoff’s ‘miracle’ rally” (1992, p. 291). Barker wrote that Popoff “grabbed a woman’s head, deliberately mussed up her hair, shook her and pronounced her healed” (p. 293). During Popoff’s healing antics, Barker noted, “The audience punctuated his ‘healings’ by loudly speaking in tongues, raising their arms, shaking, crying, and hollering ‘Amen,’ ‘Thank you, Jesus!’ and ‘Hallelujah!’ It had the feel of one of those professional wrestling matches on TV” (p. 293).

Barker’s assessment of the event was, “It was comical; and it was sad. The man was practicing medicine without a license, raising false hopes and endangering lives. (Many of his believers have discarded medicine or cancelled doctor’s appointments.) I remember having participated in meetings just like this when I was a full-gospel evangelist, and I was ashamed” (p. 294). Barker’s caustic assessment of Popoff’s “faith healing scam” is accurate in many ways. As Barker admitted, he at one time in his past participated in many false-healing events, and thus he knows the inherent dishonesty involved in such deceptive shenanigans. Here again the skeptical community has logically and correctly concluded that such faith healings are not valid. As David Mills wrote: “If God has the power to miraculously cure others (though invariably in a vague and uncertain way), why doesn’t God ever help amputees?” (2006, p. 161).

Mills is right to surmise that if the miraculous power that was available

during the time of the apostles is still available today, as many Christians erroneously teach and believe, then miracles that can be empirically verified like the healing of amputees should be documented. After all, even the enemies of the apostles had to admit that the miracles worked by the apostles were empirically verifiable: “For indeed, that a notable miracle has been done through them is evident to all who dwell in Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it” (Acts 4:16).

In truth, the skeptical community does an excellent job of showing that such “faith healing” events are emotionally charged frenzies that do not produce legitimate medical results. The problem arises, however, when the skeptical community tries to lump all Christians into this mold, or attempts to use these verifiably false miracles to discount the possibility of any type of miracle at any time in history. The fact of the matter is, the Bible predicted that the miraculous power that was available to the apostles would come to an end, and would not continue throughout the ages until modern times (Miller, 2003). Furthermore, it has been repeatedly and definitively shown that such false miracles sustain no argumentative value against the historical legitimacy of true miracles recorded in the Bible, such as the resurrection of Christ (Butt, 2002).

CONCLUSION

Mortimer J. Alder once stated, “Christianity is the only logical, consistent faith in the world” (as quoted in Sharp and Bergman, 2008, p. 288). Unfortunately, the truth of his statement is often obscured by the copious, false philosophies and inaccurate biblical interpretations that masquerade as Christianity. Calvinism, theistic evolution, inherited sin, misdefined faith, and a belief in modern-day miraculous healings are just a few of the obstacles standing in the way of a proper understanding of New Testament Christianity. To this list could be added hundreds of similar ideas fraught with error such as the unscriptural concepts of purgatory, limbo, modern-day Divine inspiration,

the perseverance of the saints, and a plethora of ridiculous “predictions” supposedly rooted in the biblical text of Revelation. Those who genuinely wish to defend the validity of New Testament Christianity must be willing and able to assess the writings of modern skeptics, separating the wheat from the chaff. By acknowledging the mistakes that are inherent in false concepts of “Christianity,” the honest-hearted truth seeker can be led to see that such foibles and errors do not mar authentic, defensible Christianity.

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NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

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CHRISTIANS SHOULD EXAMINE ISLAM

With the advent of 9/11, our world, and the way we view it, has been forever altered. As you well know, Islam has not only captured international attention, it is expanding its influence and making extensive encroachments into American culture. Almost on a daily basis, the average American is stunned, even shocked, to hear of the concessions being made to Islam in America. From permitting the construction of a mosque near ground zero, to building taxpayer-funded prayer rooms for Muslims on college campuses, Islam's encroachments are steadily increasing. Over 1,200 mosques dot the American landscape—most built within the last two decades—and more being built every day. Influential American authorities—from politicians to public school educators—are promulgating the equal acceptance and promotion of Islam in public life.

Now is the time for Christians to be informed. Now is the time for Christians to prepare themselves to help Muslims to see the truth. Five years ago, Apologetics Press released *The Quran Unveiled*, a volume intended to provide readers with an analysis of the fountain head of Islam: the Quran. Indeed, the authenticity of Islam rests on the credibility of the Quran. If the Quran is from God, it must possess the self-authenticating attributes and

characteristics of divine inspiration. If it is not from God, though it may possess certain positive, even valuable, qualities, it must be rejected as disqualified to legislate human behavior in an absolute and ultimate sense. The primary purpose of *The Quran Unveiled* is to examine Islam's holy book with a view toward ascertaining whether it is, in fact, of supernatural origin.

Apologetics Press continues to surge forward to maintain its cutting edge articulation of New Testament truth to current culture. Responding to the upsurge of Muslims into America is a part of this effort to teach the truth for Christ. We dare not ignore what is happening to the country. We must prepare ourselves to "make a defense" (1 Peter 3:15). In this month's edition of *Resources* (inside *R&R*), you'll find an advertisement with order information regarding how to purchase a copy of the book. Additionally, a DVD set of the live Islam Seminar is available. We urge you to take advantage of these tools in your evangelistic efforts to point people to Jesus Christ.

Dave Miller

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